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DAILY ENTERPRISE



(U) HISTORY TODAY - 4 December 2014

Run Date(s): 12/04/2014



(U) The U.S. Navy intercept station on Guam had some strange intercept come in 73 years ago, as recounted years later by one of the operators:

(U) "I guess around 4 o'clock, [the operator on duty] started getting some crazy traffic ..." The "crazy traffic" was some names which the operator realized before they were passed:

(U) "Whenever we heard 'Di dah di di dah dit' ... in traffic, it meant "English follows... It was going to be the name of something." In other words, the Japanese sender was going to spell out a name for something the codebook didn't contain.

(U) [The sender sent] 'Di dah di di dah dit,' and [the operator then] copied down 'Pennsylvania' and 'Maryland.' It was some states.

(U) With tensions high between the U.S. and Japan, the operator must have wondered what he was copying. "Pennsylvania" and "Maryland?" Why those two states? What was the Japanese interest in them? A few other states were given as well. What was the list for? It must indeed have seemed "crazy."

(U) This was long before the days of computers and connectivity that we take for granted today. Any intercept of interest would be packaged up and sent in hardcopy by the next surface ship. It would take weeks to reach Washington. Anything more time-sensitive would be sent hardcopy by the next Pan Am Clipper -- a flying boat built for transoceanic travel with a maximum speed of some 200 mph -- which wouldn't fly straight to Washington.

(U) The station did have an ECM*, the most sophisticated U.S. cipher machine, to encrypt radio messages. But that wouldn't be used for something that, so far, was only "crazy."

(U) They also couldn't pick up a phone to query anyone about what the traffic might mean. Station personnel didn't have to remain in the dark long, though. Within a couple of hours of receipt, station personnel realized what the traffic was. Everything became very clear very shortly.

 HISTORY TODAY - 4 Dec. 2014. (Historical photo: Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, 7 Dec. 1941/WW II.)

(U) Historical image: Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, Dec. 7, 1941/WW II

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(U) The date of this puzzling intercept was December 7, 1941. Within a couple of hours of intercept, the station got the news that Pearl Harbor had been bombed.

(U) " 'Pennsylvania' ... 'Maryland.' It was some states."

(U) No, it wasn't, and the operators realized immediately what they had copied down. Pennsylvania, Maryland, and all the rest -- California, Nevada, Arizona; West Virginia, and Tennessee -- weren't just the names of states. That wasn't what the Japanese were passing at all.

(U) What the station had intercepted was a report listing battleships -- all of which were named after states -- the Japanese had just bombed and torpedoed, with over 1,500 dead in those ships alone, at Pearl Harbor. Not that the operators had much time to worry about it, since the Japanese bombed Guam only hours later, and invaded the following day.

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(U) [Larger view of photo.](#)

(U) Have a question or comment on *History Today*? Contact us at DL cch or 

(*Note: ECM means Electric Coding Machine.)

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